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SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

International Literacy Year

Progress made and problems encountered in the struggle against illiteracy: a mid-decade review

Report of the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, as an annex to the present note, the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the progress made and problems encountered in the quest to achieve a literate world, prepared in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 46/93 of 16 December 1991.

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ANNEX

Towards a literate world: a report on progress and problems

Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. The present report has been prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/93 of 16 December 1991. Since the observance of International Literacy Year in 1990 and the convening of the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien, Thailand, in the same year, the international community and, in particular, the organizations and agencies of the United Nations, have given increased attention to the promotion of literacy and basic education as both a fundamental human right and a necessary condition for development. More recently, the critical importance of education in development was reiterated at the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and at the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995). Education, in brief, is increasingly viewed not as a sectoral concern or social service, but as an indispensable means for the transmission of culture and the renewal and advancement of society: i.e., as the motor of progress.

2. There are, indeed, both significant advances to report and major problems that remain to be resolved. The progress can be seen in rising literacy rates, a dramatic increase in the number of literate adults, especially in the developing countries, and a steady expansion in educational enrolments. The problems are equally apparent: more than one adult in five is still illiterate, an estimated total of 885 million in 1995; more than three illiterates in five are women; an estimated 129 million children of primary school-age are not enrolled in school; and even many children who are enrolled, especially in the least developed countries, attend schools that are patently inadequate in staffing, equipment and facilities to prepare them to lead productive lives in the twenty-first century.

I. SIGNS OF PROGRESS

A. Rising tide of literacy

3. Table 1 shows the increasing rates of literacy within the adult population and the rising number of literate adults. As will be observed, the literacy rate for the world as a whole has increased from an estimated 69.5 per cent in 1980 to a projected 79.4 per cent in the year 2000. During this same 20-year period, the number of literate adults will have increased by an estimated 1,394 million. A significant part of this increase is a result of improved literacy rates, especially in the developing countries. Had the literacy rate remained at the 1980 level, instead of increasing by nearly 10 per cent during the two ensuing decades, there would be 400 million fewer adult literates in the year 2000 than is now projected. Since 1960, when UNESCO first began the systematic collection and publication of literacy statistics, the literacy rate

Table 1. Estimated number of adult literates aged 15 years and over, 1980-2000

(In millions, with percentages shown in parentheses)

	Both sexes				Female			
	1980	1990	1995	2000	1980	1990	1995	2000
World	2 002 (69.5)	2 694 (75.3)	3 029 (77.4)	3 396 (79.4)	897 (61.9)	1 231 (68.7)	1 393 (71.2)	1 573 (73.6)
Developing countries	1 172 (58.0)	1 775 (67.2)	2 072 (70.4)	2 406 (73.4)	466 (46.8)	753 (57.8)	895 (61.7)	1 059 (65.5)
Sub-Saharan Africa	85 (40.2)	144 (51.3)	185 (56.8)	234 (62.0)	31 (29.2)	59 (41.1)	78 (47.3)	102 (53.3)
Arab States	39 (40.8)	67 (51.7)	86 (56.6)	108 (61.5)	12 (26.2)	24 (38.1)	33 (44.2)	43 (50.1)
Latin America/Caribbean	174 (79.7)	240 (84.9)	276 (86.6)	315 (88.2)	85 (77.5)	120 (83.5)	138 (85.5)	158 (87.4)
Eastern Asia/Oceania	624 (69.3)	944 (80.3)	1 067 (83.6)	1 196 (86.8)	257 (58.0)	418 (72.2)	480 (76.3)	548 (80.6)
Southern Asia	222 (39.1)	344 (46.6)	418 (50.2)	509 (53.7)	67 (24.5)	116 (32.6)	148 (36.6)	187 (40.7)
Least developed countries	78 (36.5)	125 (44.8)	158 (48.8)	199 (52.7)	27 (24.9)	47 (33.7)	62 (38.1)	80 (42.4)
Developed countries	830 (96.6)	919 (98.2)	957 (98.7)	990 (98.9)	431 (95.4)	478 (97.7)	497 (98.4)	514 (98.8)

Source: UNESCO Division of Statistics.

has increased at approximately 0.5 per cent per year or 5.0 per cent per decade, despite rapid population growth.

4. The deeper meaning of literacy is evident from a closer examination of the statistics. It can be calculated, for example, that whereas in 1980 over 40 per cent of all literates lived in the developed countries (including Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the United States of America, all European countries, with the exception of the States of the former Yugoslavia, and all the newly independent States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), fewer than 30 per cent are projected to do so in the year 2000. While the number of literates has increased in all regions, the progression has been especially striking in the developing countries of the East Asia/Oceania region: 572 million, an increase of over 90 per cent in 20 years. Indeed, the number of literates in the developing countries of the East Asia/Oceania region alone is projected to exceed, by over 200 million, the number in all developed countries in the year 2000. It is, of course, precisely in this region that economic growth has been most rapid and persistent. While it would be dangerous to assume a simple cause and effect relationship, it is evident that there is a powerful, if complex, linkage between education, on the one hand, and economic progress, on the other.

B. Expanding school enrolments

5. The rapid increase in the number of literate adults is a result of the expansion of primary school enrolments and, to a lesser extent, the impact of adult literacy programmes. Table 2 indicates the growth of primary enrolments from 1960 to 1990 with projections to the year 2000. As will be noted, enrolment in the developing countries increased from 217 million in 1960 to 499 million in 1990. In the least developed countries, the increase was from 12 million to 55 million, a greater than four-fold increase.

6. During the 1960s and 1970s, school enrolment expanded rapidly, at an average annual rate of 3.7 per cent. In the 1980s, the average annual growth rate declined to 1.1 per cent. In the 1990s, it is projected to increase to 1.7 per cent per year. This increase is brought about at least in part, by the renewed emphasis being placed on primary education by both Governments and international organizations and agencies following the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. While changes in educational policies take time to be implemented and have a measurable impact, one can already observe signs of progress in many countries. In a special study prepared for the Education for All Summit of the Nine High-Population Countries (New Delhi, December 1993 - see discussion in sect. IV below), it was, for example, estimated that special measures implemented in preparation for or as a follow-up to the 1990 World Conference would result in an expansion in enrolment of nearly 35 million primary school students by the year 2000. Without the special education for all initiatives - i.e., based on the trend observed from 1980 to 1990 - enrolment at the primary level in the nine countries would have reached a projected 300 million in the year 2000; with the special education for all measures put in place, it is expected to reach 335 million. The mid-term review of progress towards education for all that is presently under way will seek to identify the impact of similar education for all measures in other countries. Even from

initial findings, it is evident that the international attention focused on education for all has had a positive impact at the national level in many countries.

Table 2. Enrolment at the primary (6 to 11 year age group) level

(In millions, with percentages shown in parentheses a/)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
World	333 (59.0)	435 (65.5)	557 (73.3)	611 (79.0)	704 (79.8)
Developed countries	116 (91.7)	124 (92.7)	111 (91.8)	112 (91.6)	115 (92.5)
Developing countries	217 (47.9)	312 (57.8)	446 (69.3)	499 (76.5)	589 (77.7)
Least developed countries	12 (23.9)	23 (34.3)	40 (44.1)	55 (51.1)	73 (50.2)

Source: UNESCO Division of Statistics.

a/ The actual percentages of the age group that will enrol in primary school is higher than indicated because some children will enter school before the age of 6 and many, especially in the developing countries, will continue their primary studies after the age of 11.

7. There has also been a significant increase in the participation of girls enrolled in primary education. In 1960, girls made up only 39 per cent of enrolment in the developing countries as a whole and only 32 per cent in the least developed countries; by 1990, these rates had increased, respectively, to 45 and 44 per cent. Education for all initiatives have given high priority to the education of women and girls, particularly in countries where gender disparities are greatest. The ongoing review of education for all will measure progress not only in terms of expanding enrolments but also in relation to the reduction in the gender gap.

C. Changing nature and role of literacy programmes

8. The impact of adult literacy programmes on literacy rates is more difficult to demonstrate because of the non-formal character of the programmes, but it is none the less considered to be of great importance in many countries. China, for example, asserts that literacy work has achieved tremendous success, a total of 180 million illiterates and semi-literates having been made literate. India estimates that over 30 million persons in the 9 to 45 age range are currently engaged in its total literacy campaigns. Increasingly, literacy initiatives serve as a supplement to, not a substitute for, primary schooling. A growing

number of participants in literacy and related adult basic education activities - often a sizeable majority - have had at least a partial primary education, but have failed to achieve an adequate level of functional literacy. Literacy programmes appear to be especially attractive to women. Indeed, in some countries, over 80 per cent of participants are women. This is probably explained by the fact that girls in most developing countries have enjoyed more limited access to formal education than have boys and see literacy classes as a way of compensating for their disadvantage.

9. The aim of well-conceived literacy programmes is not only to provide basic instruction to participants, but also to foster the creation of literate and literacy-sustaining environments within communities. While large-scale campaigns continue to prevail in some countries - and serve a valuable purpose where mass illiteracy remains the key problem - there is a growing tendency for programmes to be smaller and better tailored to needs of participants. Family literacy programmes, for example, seek to combine the provision of literacy instruction and training in parenting skills with pre-school education for children. The basic assumption of such programmes is that relatively small investments in the education of parents can substantially enhance the returns on the far larger amounts invested in the education of their children.

10. One of the striking developments of the last two decades has been the generalization of literacy programmes, in various forms, to the developed regions of the world. Surveys in industrialized countries reveal, for example, that up to one adult in three would improve his work performance if his or her basic skills were upgraded. Thus, literacy programmes, once seen as emergency or transitional measures appropriate mainly to developing nations, have tended to become institutionalized and permanent in nearly all countries. In effect, such programmes are an essential part of the structure of lifelong education. They are the stepping stones that enable adults with inadequate basic skills to begin or renew their education, or upgrade their professional skills, at any point in their lives.

II. UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS

A. Persistence of illiteracy

11. Is the glass best described as almost a quarter empty or as more than three quarters full? This is the dilemma one faces in dealing with literacy statistics. The remarkable increase in the number of literate adults and the more gradual growth of literacy rates was noted above. What needs also to be emphasized here is the persistence of illiteracy revealed in table 3. As will be noted, the number of illiterates is projected to decline by only 4 million between 1990 and the year 2000. Even this, in a sense, is a sign of progress in that until 1990 there was a marked upward trend in the number of illiterates. The situation now appears to be stabilized and, indeed, a very gradual decrease is projected to occur during the coming years. None the less, if current trends persist, it will not be until the second quarter of the twenty-first century that 90 per cent of all the world's adults will be literate. As emphasized below, the international community does not passively accept these trends as

Table 3. Estimated number of adult illiterates aged 15 years and over, 1980-2000

(In millions)

	Both sexes				Female			
	1980	1990	1995	2000	1980	1990	1995	2000
World	877	885	885	881	551	561	565	565
Developing countries	848	868	872	870	531	550	557	558
Sub-Saharan Africa	126	137	141	143	76	84	87	89
Arab States	56	63	65	68	34	39	41	43
Latin America/Caribbean	44	43	43	42	25	24	23	23
Eastern Asia/Oceania	276	231	210	182	186	161	149	132
Southern Asia	346	394	416	438	207	241	256	272
Least developed countries	136	154	166	178	81	93	101	109
Developed countries	29	17	13	11	21	11	8	6

Source: UNESCO Division of Statistics.

fatalities, but, on the contrary, is working vigorously with the Governments and peoples of the United Nations to change them.

12. It is also necessary to note that although the rate of literacy among women is projected to increase (see table 1) from 62 per cent in 1980 to 74 per cent in the year 2000 and the gap between male and female literacy rates will diminish from roughly 15 percentage points to 12 during the same 20-year period, still nearly two out of every three illiterates will be women in the year 2000. This disparity in literacy rates between women and men is not only a proof of continuing inequality, it also constitutes an especially serious obstacle to development. There is abundant evidence that as literacy rates among women increase, fertility tends to decline, often significantly. While the dynamics through which education influences population growth are in dispute among demographers and other specialists, it appears that as life-support systems such as education, health, employment, pensions and legal protection become more widely available, large families - especially sons - are no longer seen as necessary to provide security in old age. Moreover, literate women not only tend to have fewer children, they also have healthier children. This is evidenced both by lower child mortality rates and higher rates of child immunization. Thus, whereas in the past development policy stressed the positive impact of educating men to increase their employability and economic productivity, the emphasis is now increasingly upon the need to educate women as the most effective means of promoting social justice and contributing to the social development and well-being of society.

B. Out-of-school children

13. While the expansion of primary enrolment in the developing countries has been impressive, there is still a long way to go before education for all becomes a reality. There are several reasons for this. The educational systems that many countries inherited from their colonial past were designed to serve the few rather than the many. In 1960, for example, less than half of the primary school-age population was enrolled in the developing countries and less than a quarter in those countries now classified as least developed. High population growth, now tapering off in most regions, has been an even more serious handicap. In the last 30 years, the school-age population of many developing countries has more than doubled. Numerous countries, especially in Africa, have also encountered serious economic difficulties that have made it impossible to carry out more ambitious educational plans. As a result of these different factors (see table 2), only an estimated 77 per cent of the primary school-age population (6 to 11 years) in the developing countries was enrolled in school in 1990. For the least developed countries, the comparable figure was 51 per cent. In absolute terms, this means that there were an estimated 129 million out-of-school children in the developing countries in 1990. Even more alarming, this figure is projected to reach 145 million in the year 2000, if urgent action is not taken to expand educational opportunities. Approximately 60 per cent of out-of-school children are girls.

14. Providing adequate learning opportunities for all children will obviously be an enormous task. It is estimated that if universal primary education is to be achieved by the year 2000, buildings, teachers and instructional materials

will have to be provided for an additional 233 million more students than were enrolled in 1990. As approximately a quarter of students enrolled in primary schools in 1990 in the developing countries (an estimated 118 million) were either above or below the official school age, improved efficiency, especially a reduction in the number of students who repeat classes, could considerably reduce the need for additional places. Still the challenge is enormous, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where school places would have to be more than doubled.

C. Drop-out and repetition

15. The number of out-of-school children is considerably increased by the high drop-out rate experienced in developing countries. A UNESCO study, for example, estimates that of the 95 million children who started primary school in the developing regions of the world in 1988, an estimated 25 million dropped out before reaching grade 4. Early drop out has a direct and serious implication for the progress of literacy. As a rule of thumb, it is considered that four years of primary schooling represent the minimum needed to achieve an enduring level of literacy. By this measure, an estimated 30 million youth per year joined the ranks of illiterate adults during the 1980s: a minority of these youth never started school and a large majority of them entered but dropped out before reaching grade 4. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, a significant portion of the drop-out rate is a result of inadequate access to schooling. Elsewhere, the causes appear to be mainly social, economic and cultural, although the perceived inadequacies of the school system seriously reduce its appeal to parents and children alike.

16. Dropping out is often preceded by and related to grade repetition. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that 20 per cent or more of children repeat grades. In other regions, repetition rates of 10 per cent or higher are common. Repetition is particularly high in the first two or three grades where the unrestricted admission of children from a wide age-range typically leads to overcrowded classrooms and unsuitable conditions. As a result, large numbers of children may spend four or more years in school, but will none the less fail to complete the fourth grade or master even the most basic educational skills. This obviously blunts the impact of schooling in improving adult literacy rates.

D. Need for improved quality

17. The World Declaration on Education for All adopted at Jomtien on 9 March 1990 emphasizes that schooling must be viewed as a means and not as an end and that whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development - for an individual or for society - depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities. The issue of how to ensure effective learning is, of course, a very complex one. Much depends upon a student's background and motivation and the circumstances of the community in which he or she lives. Poverty is almost certainly the greatest obstacle to learning. Environments that make little use of literacy, have few reading materials and offer few, if any, incentives to become literate are an evident and still common problem in many parts of the world.

18. One must not, however, overlook the many defects of the schools themselves. There is a serious shortage of qualified teachers in most developing countries. The rapid expansion of schooling in the 1960s and 1970s required a relaxation of standards in order to put teachers into classrooms in the numbers required. While some countries have made excellent progress in upgrading the education and professional qualifications of their teaching force, many have not had the resources to do so.. School facilities also tend to be inadequate and poorly maintained. In many countries, there is a dramatic shortage of textbooks and learning materials. A World Bank study on Nigeria notes, for example, that it is common for 50 children to share a single book. In part, these problems are brought about by the fact that teachers' salaries, although extremely low in most countries, consume over 90 per cent of educational budgets, leaving little money for the maintenance of buildings or the purchase of supplies. UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are cooperating in a survey of the conditions of education in the least developed countries with the aim of obtaining an objective measure of what the situation is in order that appropriate steps may be taken to improve it. It is already evident, however, that many schools are insufficiently staffed and equipped to provide an adequate basic education. Indeed, in certain of the least developed countries, parents are showing a growing reluctance to enrol their children in schools that are clearly unable to educate them and, indeed, may even endanger their health and well-being by confining them in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities.

III. SUMMING UP THE PRESENT SITUATION

19. How should the present situation be characterized? On the positive side, the world map of literacy has been redrawn by the developments of the last decades. High literacy rates are no longer to be found only in the older industrialized countries. Many developing countries, especially in East Asia but also in Latin America and the Caribbean, have literacy rates approaching or exceeding 90 per cent. Nor are literacy programmes any longer an exclusive feature of developing countries. Illiteracy and functional illiteracy are increasingly recognized as major problems in the countries of Europe and North America. As noted above, the rise in literacy rates and the expansion of school enrolments represent a potent and positive transformation in the world situation. Of equal significance is the growing importance being accorded to education and more particularly to literacy, the most essential of educational skills. Education is no longer seen as merely another social service - a claimant among many others for a share of limited public resources. Education is increasingly regarded as the means through which societies renew, re-energize and redirect themselves. The future is seen to depend, above all else, upon human creativity and competence and education is recognized as the means through which these are engendered. Educated and trained people are, in the last analysis, the ultimate resource of every society. Their qualities and competencies determine not only what a society can produce, but also, and more importantly, what it can become.

20. On the negative side, there is an entire litany of problems that can be cited: the inadequate coverage of existing education systems, gender discrimination, drop out, repetition, inadequately trained teachers, poorly maintained facilities, terrible shortages of books and supplies, environments

incapable of sustaining literacy, low levels of achievement and, perhaps most troubling of all, a declining faith in the effectiveness and relevance of education to improve and enrich the lives of the poorest students. In short, the situation is unquestionably challenging. But it is also hopeful and promising. The proof that progress can be made is the fact that so much has already been accomplished. The vision of creating a literate world is still remote, but its is no longer an impossible dream.

IV. IMPROVING FUTURE PROSPECTS

A. Awareness-building and mobilization

21. In 1989, the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-fifth session adopted a Plan of Action for the Eradication of Illiteracy by the Year 2000 a/ setting forth the Organization's strategy in the area, which it regards as its "priority of priorities". International Literacy Year, 1990, on which UNESCO reported to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, b/ was an integral part of this plan. The purpose of the Year was to alert world public opinion to the problem of illiteracy and to mobilize national and international action to promote education and literacy. As noted in the report on the Year, a survey of 130 major national and regional newspapers revealed that 7.5 times as many articles were carried on literacy and basic education in 1990 than had been the case in 1988. The establishment of committees for the year in 118 countries, certain of which continue to function, also served to mobilize public opinion and to promote action by Governments and non-governmental organizations.

22. The second major purpose of the Plan of Action was to rally the international community to take concerted and coordinated action in support of education. The Director-General of UNESCO has noted that education for all needs the contribution to education from all and that if vision is combined with pragmatism, political will with economic resourcefulness, international solidarity with national commitment, the expertise of educators with the fresh contributions of the media, science and technology, the business community, voluntary organizations and many others - then, and probably only then, the struggle to bring education to all can be won. The World Conference on Education for All, organized under the joint sponsorship of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, and with support of 18 other co-sponsors or associate sponsors, provided the forum for rallying the international community to the cause of education.

23. The International Literacy Year and the World Conference on Education for All, in effect, shared a common purpose. The way to create a literate world is by providing education to all people. UNESCO has accordingly pursued the follow-up to the Year and the World Conference through a unified programme of initiatives and activities conducted mainly by the Basic Education Division. In the sections that follow, major aspects of this effort are briefly described.

B. International Consultative Forum on Education for All

24. At Jomtien, it was decided that the follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All would rely mainly on existing mechanisms. An International Consultative Forum on Education for All was, however, set up to monitor progress towards education for all and to promote consultation and cooperation at the global level. The Forum, which has 60 members, meets bi-annually. Between sessions of the Forum, its 14-member Steering Committee guides and assists the Forum's secretariat, based at UNESCO headquarters, in carrying out mandated activities. The Forum has developed both a core programme and an extended programme to support the education for all movement. The Core programme includes monitoring progress and problems, publication of a quarterly bulletin, maintenance of a database on education for all indicators and activities, contributing to education for all-related events, and ensuring that education for all is accorded an appropriate place on the agenda of major conferences and other events. The extended programme covers activities sponsored and implemented by different agencies under the auspices of the Forum, including those aimed at providing basic learning materials to developing countries, meeting the learning needs of girls and women, promoting education for all in the most populous developing countries, and mobilizing the media and the private sector in support of education for all initiatives.

C. The education for all process

25. The Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs endorsed by the World Conference on Education for All recognizes the primary responsibility of individual countries in meeting the basic learning needs of their citizens and residents. It also acknowledges the wide diversity of situations and the need for each country to tailor its approach to its own possibilities and circumstances. In keeping with this philosophy, the first steps towards education for all had to take place within countries. The recommended first step - and the one taken in most countries - involved the holding of education for all round tables to gather local expertise in order to assess the status of education for all within the particular countries and to make proposals for necessary action. These round tables also served to mobilize potential education for all partners, including the private and voluntary sectors. In the first two years following the Conference, some 60 round tables took place in developing countries around the world. The national round tables were meant to lead on the formulation of national action plans for achieving education for all and, in most cases, have done so. These national plans serve to clarify and specify the actions that need to be taken at the national level to achieve education for all. In many cases, it is evident that the plans and the process through which they were developed have given new priority to basic education and literacy. This is particularly apparent in the nine high-population developing countries (see below) that were the subject of a special study conducted by UNESCO. All nine countries increased their budgets for basic education by more than 50 per cent between 1989, when preparation for the Conference began, and 1993.

26. The Conference has also had a powerful and beneficial impact upon the actions of donor countries and international agencies. Not only has the

Conference encouraged additional aid to basic education and literacy, it has also improved the effectiveness of such assistance. The existence of well-formulated education for all plans, for example, has enabled donors to support comprehensive national action rather than providing project assistance on an ad hoc basis. The clarification of national goals and needs has also provided a basis for increased dialogue and coordination among donors and with partner countries. One of the side effects has been to highlight the need for more accurate information on donor support to basic education which has resulted in changes in the manner in which the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) collects and classifies data on development assistance to education. In certain cases, the plans have provided the arguments needed to overcome traditional donor reticence to finance recurrent costs, notably teachers' salaries. Where support for such costs is essential to the success of well-conceived national efforts, donors have, in a number of cases, agreed to cover them.

27. One of the key issues to be examined in the mid-term review of basic education (see below) will be the extent of the increase in donor support for basic education. The initial indications on this point are ambiguous. The largest single source of financial assistance to developing countries, the World Bank, has reportedly increased aid to basic education four-fold. The regional banks, particularly the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, have also significantly increased their support. UNDP reports that basic education received 32 per cent of total expenditures on education during 1993, a total of $43 million dollars. UNICEF has increased the proportion of its programme budget spent on basic education from 8 to 11 per cent and plans to achieve a 20 per cent rate of expenditure by the end of the decade. Basic education is the main focus of UNESCO's Education Sector and is also supported by programmes in other sectors. As concerns bilateral aid, the tide, regrettably, appears to be receding. The percentage of gross national product devoted to official development aid by the OECD countries declined in 1993 to an estimated 0.30 per cent, the lowest level since 1973. It is, as yet, unclear what proportion of such aid was devoted to basic education.

D. Educational for all in the nine high-population countries

28. Numerous special initiatives have been undertaken within the framework of education for all. These have focused on the least developed countries, on women and girls and on other selected target groups. Certainly the most publicized of these was the Education for All Summit of the Nine High-Population Countries that took place at New Delhi in December 1993, at the invitation of the Government of India and with the support of UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNESCO. A follow-up meeting with the leaders of the same countries was held at Copenhagen in conjunction with the World Summit for Social Development in March 1995. Collectively, the nine countries represented at the Summit - Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan - account for more than half of the world's population and over 70 per cent of the world's illiterate adults. Unless literacy statistics improve in these countries, there can be no significant improvement for the world as a whole. Accordingly, these countries have a special responsibility.

Their leaders recognize this obligation and are eager to see their countries serve as examples to their regions and to the world as a whole.

29. All nine countries possess substantial means and enormous potential. In particular, all of these nations have long and proud traditions in education and well-trained and able professional educators in their ministries, institutes and universities. In addition, as vast and populous nations, they share a number of common problems. In the follow-up to the Summit, the nine countries identified the promotion of distance education as an area in which cooperation could be mutually beneficial. As a first step in this cooperation, all countries are presently engaged in carrying out a comprehensive analysis of their situations in order to develop strategies for applying distance education to support education for all initiatives. It is envisaged that meetings among officials of the nine countries will take place on a regular basis to promote progress within countries and cooperation among them.

E. Monitoring learning achievement

30. As noted above, education is effective only to the extent that it leads to meaningful and useful learning. Thus, if education is truly to meet the basic learning needs of individuals, qualitative improvement is as important an issue as quantitative expansion. Developing effective monitoring systems is an indispensable step in measuring and improving learning outcomes. These considerations led UNESCO and UNICEF to establish a joint project for monitoring learning achievement. The overriding aim of the project is to assist countries in building national capacities in order that they may effectively monitor progress towards the educational goals that they have set for themselves. The project focuses on the learning achievement of primary-school pupils in the areas of literacy, numeracy and life skills. By examining both school-related factors and student and home characteristics, the study seeks to identify ways in which policy-makers could use resources more effectively to improve student achievement.

31. In its first phase (1992-1993), the project was implemented in five developing countries. An additional 13 countries participated in its second phase in 1994. The project is designed to have a powerful multiplier effect. First, national teams are selected and offered training in modern assessment techniques. Then, the members of the national team themselves become trainers. A total of 26 national workshops and 240 subnational workshops were held in the five countries that participated in the initial phase of the project. A handbook has also been prepared to enable other countries that cannot presently be accommodated in the project nonetheless to benefit from it. In short, a critical issue was identified and an innovative strategy planned and implemented to deal with it. While this is but one of many initiatives intended to accelerate the progress of education for all, it is an example of the effective use that can be made of limited resources to meet critical educational needs.

F. Identifying and diffusing ideas that work

32. "Education for all: Making it work" is another project being carried out by UNESCO with the support of UNICEF, UNDP, Germany and other partners. It seeks to identify and make known effective and innovative educational strategies. The project has two basic premises. The first is that cheaper and more effective means have to be found, if education for all is to become a reality. The second is that the best measure of an effective project is the result it is achieving. Thus, in the first phase, the project searches out uncommon approaches that have proved successful in resolving common problems. To this end, project staff, with the aid of an advisory group made up of educators from all parts of the world, screen promising projects and approaches and identify those that are not only successful in a particular setting, but also have the potential to work elsewhere. Once projects are identified, they are carefully studies and documented. Then, if upon closer examination the ideas still appear promising, case-studies are published and videos prepared to diffuse project ideas. The goals of the project are: (a) to promote basic education in developing countries by identifying affordable approaches that benefit in particular girls and women, children from disadvantaged groups, street children, drop-outs and learners in remote areas; (b) to help educational personnel better manage evaluate and go to scale with promising innovations; and (c) to increase cooperation and information exchange among developing countries. To date, five case-studies have been published and videos are available on 22 projects. Many of the projects featured are examples of the provision of basic education through non-formal means.

G. Mid-term reviews

33. UNESCO is presently engaged in a mid-decade review of its Plan of Action, covering the decade 1990-1999, which will be submitted to the General Conference at its twenty-eighth session in October 1995. The review will examine the extent to which world public opinion has been alerted to the problem and to the dangers of illiteracy, the degree to which the international community has been mobilized, and the effectiveness of its four regional programmes for literacy: the major project in the field of education in Latin America and the Caribbean (established in 1981), the regional programme for the eradication of illiteracy in Africa (1981), the regional programme for universal provision and renewal of primary education and eradication of illiteracy in Asia and the Pacific (1987) and the regional programme for the universalization and renewal of primary education and the eradication of illiteracy in the Arab States (1989). While these programmes differ in their modes of operation, each being suited to the particular needs of the region it serves, all share common objectives and rely mainly upon technical cooperation among developing countries: i.e., promoting and facilitating exchanges of experience and expertise among participating countries. The advisory and/or governing committees of the regional programmes are actively involved in these reviews and in the reformulation of goals and operating procedures, where such changes are judged necessary.

34. The International Consultative Forum on Education for All will be the focal point for the mid-decade review of education for all. The Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs adopted by the World Conference foresaw such a

review in terms of Governments and organizations undertaking mid-term evaluations of the implementation of their respective plans and adjusting them as needed; and Governments, organizations and development agencies undertaking comprehensive policy reviews at regional and global levels (1995-1996). In effect, UNESCO's review of its Plan of Action will be a part of this larger review of progress and problems. In keeping with the decentralized nature of education for all follow-up, the review will involve many partners and have many stages and aspects. Donors will be invited to make a self-assessment, identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of the support they have provided to education for all in partner countries. The results of these self-assessments will then be examined in the regular meetings among donors that take place in various forums. The education for all network of non-governmental organizations will undertake a review of the actions by non-governmental organizations, both individually and collectively, to promote basic education. The UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs on Literacy and Basic Education, which will be held in Japan in September 1995, will be used to facilitate this review process.

35. The principal focus of these reviews will, of course, be upon the progress of education for all in developing countries. Guidelines for Governments have been prepared to assist countries in reviewing their activities. The purposes of the review at national level are: (a) to construct a comprehensive picture of each country's progress towards education for all since the 1990 World Conference; (b) to identify priorities and promising strategies for overcoming obstacles and accelerating progress; and (c) to revise national plans of action, as required. It is also proposed that the Jomtien partners organize regional or subregional meetings to enable educators and policy makers from different countries to compare results and identify strategies and approaches that have worked as well as those that have not. Such meetings should also serve to refocus national attention on education for all and to give due recognition to those responsible for achievements and progress.

36. The secretariat of the Forum will synthesize the results of the reviews of education for all at the national level as well as those being carried out by donors, non-governmental organizations and other partners. This synthesis of major findings will then be submitted to the Forum at its 1996 meeting for an in-depth examination. On the basis of its analysis and deliberations, it is expected that the Forum will formulate a set of recommendations, addressed to the various education for all partners, intended to ensure the greater effectiveness of future action. The individual countries, organizations and agencies will then consider such proposals in accordance with their respective procedures. It should be emphasized that the mid-term review of education for all is intended not only to analyse progress and problems, but also to reenergize the entire education for all process by documenting what has been achieved and underscoring what remains to be done.

V. CONCLUSIONS

37. What are the messages that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly should derive from the present report?

(a) First, that progress is being made in the quest to provide education for all and to achieve a literate world. Yes, major problems remain and continuing - even greatly increased - efforts are required, but the goal can be achieved. Indeed, even in the remaining years of the twentieth century, a major breakthrough can be accomplished;

(b) Secondly, that the organizations and agencies of the United Nations - in fact the international community as a whole - are working together effectively to promote progress towards education for all. In part, this reflects the correctness of the decentralized approach to follow-up adopted at Jomtien and the effectiveness of the Forum established to promote cooperation and coordination at the global level. But, in the main, it reflects a growing awareness that the progress and well-being of humanity depend upon education. Whatever the development objective - be it the promotion of peace, the control of population growth, the reduction of poverty or the protection of the environment - it cannot be achieved without education. The "glue" that holds the Jomtien partnership together is a strong sense of shared purpose and common interest.

38. It is to be hoped that 1990 will be recorded in history as a turning-point in the struggle against illiteracy. Not only was it the International Literacy Year, it was also the year which witnessed, for the first time, a stabilization in the number of the world's illiterate adults. Of even greater importance, it was the year in which a powerful alliance dedicated to education for all was forged at Jomtien. Five years on, the spirit of Jomtien is still very much alive and the collective effort to which it gave birth continues to flourish. Education for all is, more than ever, a priority of the international community.

Notes

a/ See UNESCO, Records of the General Conference, Twenty-fifth Session, vol. 1 Resolutions, p. 71.

b/ A/46/28-E/1991/112.